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Our Own Race War

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planation of something which needed none. Complaining that in Washington the Senate involved the subject in mist, he proceeded himself to immerse it in a veritable London fog.

We all know his theory of Presidential functions, which he has not only publicly expressed but also diligently and pertinaciously endeavored to exemplify in his own administration of the office; and which is at direct variance with that of the Constitution and with the best practice of his predecessors. He has told us that the President is the sole official representative of the whole nation, and that he is required to make report to nobody but the nation at large; that he is not to be the mere Chief Executive, but is to be the general initiator and director of policies of government, so that instead of his executing the laws which Congress enacts, Congress will enact the laws which he prescribes. We cannot agree with that theory, and we are confident that the American nation does not. But even if it were the correct theory, and if such was the proper place of the President in our governmental system, we should doubt if it were possible for anyone to show himself more thoroughly unsuited to fill such a place than President Wilson has done and is doing in this amazing exhibition of himself at his worst.

OUR OWN RACE WAR

A MORDANT reflection upon the zeal of some Americans to implicate this country in all the racial and other conflicts which may arise in Europe appears in the circumstance of record that at the very time when they were seeking that end the United States was itself suffering a race war of its own, of most exacerbated character and ominous proportions. If the disturbances, riots and loss of life, often under the most atrocious circumstances, which have recently occurred at Chicago, Washington, Knoxville, St. Louis, Memphis, Birmingham and elsewhere, had occurred in some minor European country, and had involved some minority racial or religious element, there would have been in this country vociferous and impassioned protests, demands for intervention, denunciations of the country in question as incapable of decent government, and solemn preachments upon the necessity of our tying ourselves hand and foot in a League of Nations in order to put a stop to

such doings. It might be well for such altruistic propagandists to consider the ancient adjuration, Physician, heal thyself.

For it is manifest that the troubles here have all the essential characteristics of a race war, of nation-wide extent. We used to hear of and censoriously to deplore persecutions and lynchings in the South. These did occur, and still occur. But for years past the most extensive and most bitter conflicts between the white and black races have occurred in the North, and it is there that such racial antagonism is to-day by far most ominous. For it is there that it most arises from deep-seated, general causes. It is true that all or nearly all of these savage outbreaks, like the lynchings in the South, are attributed to some local and temporary causes. Probably such incidents do serve as pretexts. But it would be a fatal mistake to suppose that such were the sole or chief causes of the troubles. The real cause, which makes the danger that local and temporary incidents will thus be used as pretexts for widespread conflicts, lies much deeper and further back, in a general and permanent state of mind.

A century and a third ago the evil was unerringly forecast. At that time the State of New York sought to get rid of human slavery and the Legislature adopted a bill for its gradual abolition. But the bill was vetoed for the reason that while it emancipated negroes it also disfranchised them. The Council of Revision in vetoing the bill, which otherwise it would have been eager to approve, dwelt strongly upon the actual and potential evil of thus creating a class of citizens suffering from invidious discrimination, charged with the same duties, responsibilities and accountability to the law that their neighbors were, but enjoying less rights and privileges. Such a system would not merely establish an aristocracy instead of a democracy, but would create a dissatisfied and discontented class, which some time might be a menace to the State.

That was quite true then, and it is equally true and applicable to-day, in a wider and deeper sense. In the Southern States the negroes are emancipated but practically disfranchised. In the North they are both emancipated and enfranchised, but they suffer severe adverse discrimination on social and economic grounds which is in some respects

more offensive to them and more mischievous in its results than exclusion from the ballot.

Now the result of this is just what the New York Council of Revision foresaw in 1785, only it is still more extensive. It is both objective and subjective. It causes the negroes to feel themselves the object of adverse discrimination, and thus makes them dissatisfied and discontented. Being human, some of them become resentful. Such influences working on the baser minds among them incite to crime, while they cause even the better minds to sympathize with those who thus violently and unlawfully protest, and to resist the just punishment of the criminals. Thus a certain solidarity of the race is produced, causing what would otherwise be an insignificant incident often to be exploited into widespread disorder.

Even more serious is the subjective influence of this state of affairs upon the white race. It is not to be doubted that because of their discrimination against them, white men generally have a less favorable regard for negroes than they otherwise would, and are thus inclined to take more severe measures against them for any lapses by individuals. An outrage or two, even of the most offensive kind, committed by a member of any other race, would not inspire any general movement against that race as a whole, as such occurrences too often do when the guilty persons are negroes.

Both races are, in brief, suffering from the logical and, it is to be feared, inevitable effects of the discrimination of the one against the other, and of the division of the citizenry of the country into two classes, with either actually or practically different rights and privileges. This diagnosis of the case does not, of course, convey a prescription for its immediate cure. But a frank recognition of the cause of the trouble should at least tend towards its ultimate amelioration. What is quite certain is that it should act as a restraint upon our too frequent censoriousness of other nations, and a prudent deterrent upon those who would make us a party to or a guardian against similar troubles in other lands. We should certainly—even, we imagine, the President would—object to having European nations intervene in our domestic race war, or to our being required to give guarantees to, let us say, Poland and Czecho-Slovakia, that we would not permit pogroms against the negroes.